# Mentoring Fundamentals

## Prepare students for a good start

Through first-hand experience, online educators have learned that a good placement and a good start are critical. Most providers have few barriers to registration in the form of eligibility requirements (grades, GPA, etc). However, significant effort is put into advising students into a solid match and a positive online learning experience.

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## A GOOD MATCH

It is very important for students' academic needs to be properly matched with their abilities and expectations of online learning. Academic advisors or counselors serving this function play a critical role. Advisors need to be well versed in the online learning environment and have access to a student's academic record.

- Academic skill levels. Online learning requires considerable reading, writing, and communication. Math and science courses further the challenge with complex subject matter. Academic performance and test scores (including HSPE, MSP, or other tests your school administers) can be used to identify any potential performance concerns prior to enrollment. Advisors must confirm that prerequisites have been met. Gaps can be addressed by having the student take a refresher course, arrange for a tutor, or choose a more appropriate course.
- Learning style and expectations. It is important for a student (and parent) to understand what kind of a learner he or she is and what online learning entails. With those baseline understandings, a student can identify what study behaviors need to be changed, arrange extra support, or perhaps, consider another learning option. Ideally, advisors explain this up front through a one-on-one session or informational group meetings. Students are encouraged to use internet resources such as success indicators and online learning preparedness quizzes to build self-awareness and confidence.
- Student capacity and needs. Consider factors in a student's learning environment that may adversely impact success, such as access to a computer/internet at home, support at home, health issues, or conflicting activities. Course load is also a factor.

## A GOOD START

Recovering from a late or problematic start is very difficult for students, regardless of the subject matter of their online course. The presence of a local advisor is the most effective aid to students during this phase, but these actions may be performed by the online teacher or support roles staffed by the online provider.

## STRATEGIES FOR A WELL-PREPARED STUDENT

- Connect with students right away in a face-to-face or synchronous online session to help them learn how to navigate the system and successfully complete the course orientation.
- Be quick and persistent in dealing with students who have not logged on or are slow to make progress.
- Use quick "tip sheets" that are short, easy to understand, and are available outside of the course itself for common start up questions such as logging on, finding the orientation, contacting the teacher, and submitting assignments.
- Connect with parents early on and invite them to attend orientations. Use the opportunity to educate them on how to support their student.
- Communicate with local technical people early and get technical issues fixed quickly (for students taking courses in a school building).
- Monitor students closely in the beginning and make a change if it's a bad match.

## INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO PREPARING STUDENTS

- Pre-screen math skills for courses that require high math abilities (science, computer programming, etc).
- Create a teacher role to focus solely on the start up and beginning lessons. When the student has successfully completed orientation requirements, transition the instruction to the course teacher.
- Create an advisory period where the student checks in during a synchronous session or a face-to-face session at a learning center every week at a certain day/time. Discuss progress, get help, plan ahead, etc.
- Include taking a career interest inventory, connecting college to career, and building the High School and Beyond Plan into the orientation activities to continue to build self-awareness about a student's skills and abilities.
- Student Steps to Success. Tips for getting off to a good start to share with students.